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The situation in the Middle East

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Sixty-fourth year

Identical letters dated 7 April 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On 27 March 2009, the left leg and the right hand of a 10-year-old boy named Mohammad Jamal Abdel-Aal were amputated after a cluster bomb exploded while he was playing in one of the fields near his home in the southern town of Hilta.

Recalling the few minutes that preceded the explosion, Mohammad said that he had gone out to a field near his house "to take advantage of the springtime weather".

"I was walking between the yellow daisies when I heard an explosion and felt my body being ripped apart", he said, adding that he started to feel pain in his leg and was bleeding everywhere. "Then everything turned black. I was not able to play anymore", Mohammad told the reporters.

Also in March, a 16-year-old boy named Riad al-Ahmad lost his leg from an Israeli landmine. Riad was herding his sheep in a field of the southern village of Wazanni when a remaining Israeli landmine exploded.

The biggest risk to the lives of children in South Lebanon is from landmines, cluster bombs and other unexploded ordnance left by the Israeli forces. They will take years to clear.

In the last 72 hours of the Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006, Israel dropped around 4 million cluster bombs all across South Lebanon after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which called for the cessation of hostilities. Many failed to detonate on impact, becoming de facto landmines, which have proven to be a deadly threat to unsuspecting civilians. Twelve million square metres of land remain contaminated.

In the words of Mr. Jan Egeland, former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs: "What is shocking, and I would say to me completely immoral, is that 90 per cent of the cluster bomb strikes occurred in the last 72 hours

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of the conflict when we knew there would be a resolution, when we really knew there would be an end to this".

Since the cessation of hostilities, 337 people, 34 of whom are children, have been killed or maimed by unexploded bombs that landed indiscriminately in civilian areas. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan said at the time: "... even if there is only one mine in the field, it is the kind of weapon that long after the conflict lies there silently waiting to maim and kill".

On 19 March 2009, Fuad Musa Ghanawi was severely wounded after stepping on an Israeli cluster bomb. He later died on the way to the hospital. Fuad was also herding his sheep in the Soluky Valley of southern Lebanon.

On 13 March 2009, Hussein Hamieh, 20-years-old, was severely wounded in different parts of his body by another cluster bomb explosion while working in a field on the outskirts of the southern town of Qana.

Also on 13 March, Kassem Alyan slightly escaped death from a cluster bomb explosion while cleaning around his home in the village of Al-Bayada in southern Lebanon.

On 27 March, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Michael Williams, again urged Israel to provide maps indicating the location of cluster bombs in South Lebanon. He noted that Israel has ignored previous requests to hand over the maps.

The persistent Israeli defiance of your calls and those of the Security Council to hand over the exact strike data and the maps of the cluster munitions is only another flagrant and blatant violation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). The unjustifiable Israeli refusal puts the lives of the Lebanese people, both civilian and military, and those of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL), including the demining officers, at risk on a daily basis. This refusal further deprives the effective utilization of vast agrarian lands in southern Lebanon.

The Lebanese Government wishes to reiterate its firm position condemning any violation of resolution 1701 (2006), regardless of its justification. The Lebanese authorities are actively cooperating with UNIFIL in ensuring peace and security in South Lebanon.

I wish to emphasize the gravity of Israel's actions, which are untenable and which add to the ongoing Israeli violations of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). These violations include, among others, daily overflights and incursions of Lebanese sovereignty and the occupation of Lebanese lands in the northern part of Al-Ghajar village, the Sheba'a Farms and the Kafarshuba Hills.

I kindly request that the present letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 15, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nawaf **Salam**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative